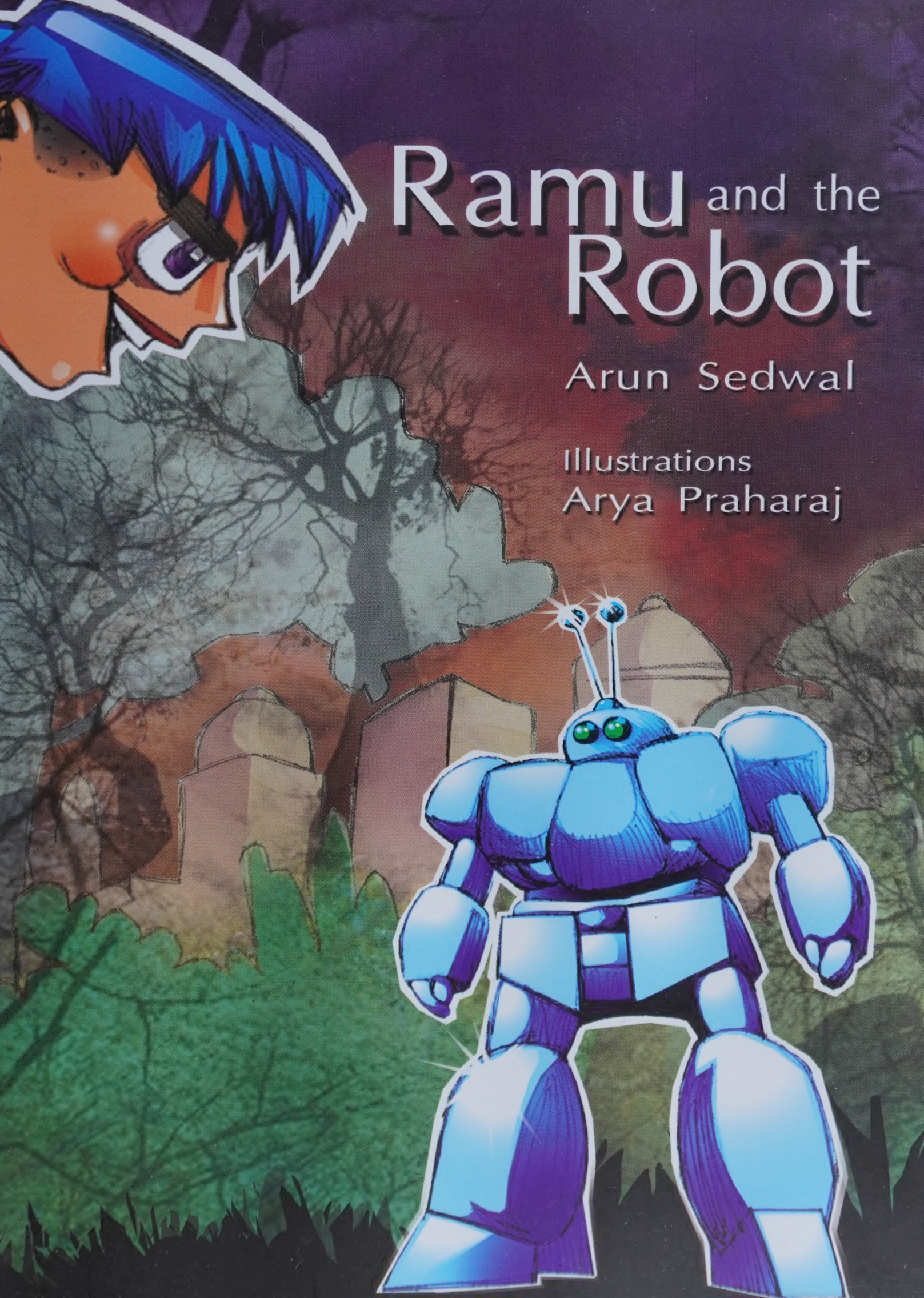
Ramu and the Robot
Arun Sedwal
Illustrations
Arya Praharaj

*Nehru Bal Pustakalaya*

# RAMU AND THE ROBOT

**Arun Sedwal**

Illustrations

**Arya Praharaj**

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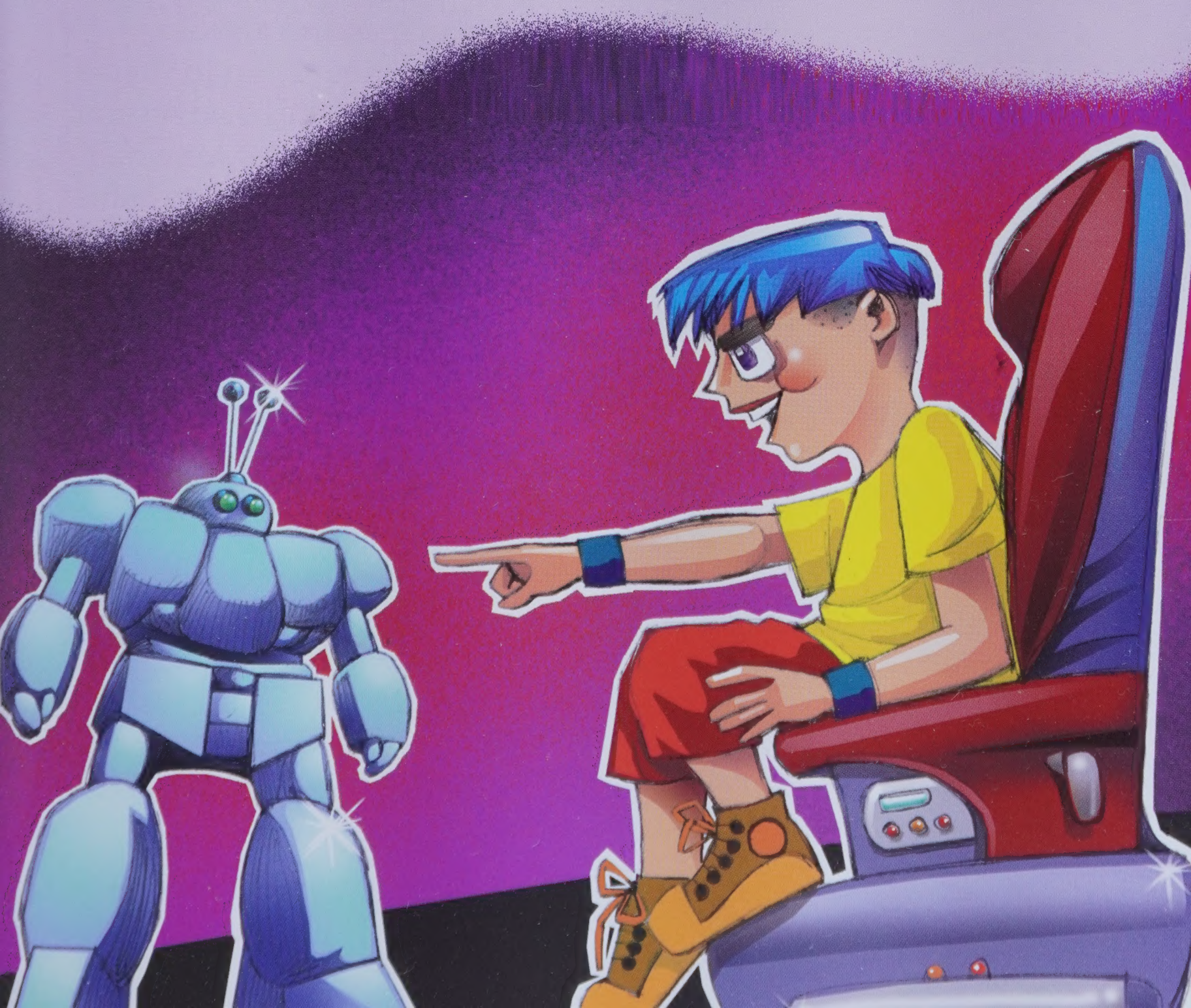
## A BIRTHDAY GIFT FOR RAMU

Ramu's father was an old fashioned man. Though born and brought up in the twenty-first century, mentally he was still a twentieth century man. He did not believe in the idea of getting all work done by machines. He went out for long morning walks, exercised in the



old gymnasium and did his personal work, like reading and writing, himself. Therefore, Ramu had great difficulty in convincing his father to buy a robot for him. Almost all his friends owned these man-like machines. There was a robot in practically all the rooms of his school to attend to the teaching jobs of the teachers. The robots answered the students' questions while the teachers sat comfortably in their chairs, monitoring the class-work just by looking at the screen of their watches and giving commands to robot-teachers.

When Ramu urged that even in the twentieth century people used to engage tutors to coach their children at home, Ramu's father finally agreed to buy a robot for him. They both went to a robot laboratory where Ramu selected the most sleek-looking one which was also capable of solving complex sums of mathematics and algebra.

Ramu was very happy now. He named the robot Rabu to rhyme with his own name. Then he sat in his rocking chair which had several push-buttons and flash lights fitted on its arms. His eyes were half-closed. He was popping sandwich balls into his mouth. Some of his teeth were made of white steel, a specially developed metal for making permanent dentures. Ramu pressed a button and the robot started speaking. It was a history lesson. Ramu wondered how the twentieth century man lived without a single robot like this one for their help. He pressed another button and Rabu did his mathematics, translation and cosmology lessons. Then he instructed Rabu to put his micro-books—like small potato chips—in a wallet for going to school.

Gradually, Rabu started helping Ramu in most of his school and personal work. He had only to press some buttons and Rabu instantly did whatever Ramu ordered for. While Rabu completed all the homework, Ramu enjoyed at leisure by listening to music capsules or watching movies on a small screen fitted on the arm of his chair. He stopped reading his text books and solving the sums. He spent most of his time idling around and even stopped playing.

ROBOT FOR
IMMEDIATE
SALE

Ramu would often consult Rabu before doing anything: which shirt should I wear today? What should I eat? How should I spend the evening? With which friend should I go out? What should I read? Whenever Ramu faced any problem, he would take the advice of Rabu.

In a way, Ramu had become completely dependent upon the robot. Seeing that Ramu was becoming too lazy by not doing his own work, his father got worried. He told Ramu to reduce his dependency on the robot but Ramu would not listen to him. He argued that even his teachers used a robot for teaching, so why couldn't he use it for learning?

Come final school examinations and Ramu sat in the hall gazing and gasping. He did not know how to answer the questions. He was not allowed to bring Rabu for helping him in the examination papers. Ramu then realised that the robot had reduced him to a boy fit only for pressing the coloured buttons.

Ramu was not promoted to the next grade, as his performance in the examination was very poor. He was very sad. But as was his habit, he asked Rabu, "Why have I failed?"

"Because you did not solve the questions correctly," Rabu replied.

"What should I do now?" Ramu asked, desperately.

"Sell off the robot and try to learn the lessons yourself. It is still not late." Rabu said with mischievous spark in the green lenses of its eyes.

Ramu could not ignore Rabu's advice and next morning, quite against his wish, he sent an advertisement request in the tele-news 'Robot for immediate sale. Robot can act as a good teacher and perform all kinds of jobs.'

## RABU JUNKED

Ramu decided to sell Rabu, his friendly robot. Having released the announcement for sale he was sitting sad and dejected. At a loss to decide what he should do next. For a few days he did nothing except consuming vitamin-water and some sandwich balls.

Nobody came to purchase his robot. Ramu knew that it was difficult to sell an old machine. So he placed Rabu in a junk room.

Then he started feeling that his life had become drab and incomplete without Rabu. His father was out for a week-long trip to an underground factory near the South Pole where sea water, minerals and weeds were processed into edible food in the form of balls, cubes, flakes and drops. When he returned, he found that Rabu, who used to open the door, was nowhere around and Ramu was sulking, sitting in his chair.

"What has gone wrong, Ramu, dear?" His father enquired pushing a button on Ramu's chair which instantly made the room cool, fragrant and comfortable.

Ramu did not reply for a while. When his father goaded him, Ramu narrated the entire story. His father sat near Ramu, pondering. After a while he said, "Son! Don't worry about your failure in the examination. There is always next time when you can do better." He paused for a while and continued, "Do not sell your Rabu. As a matter of fact, you can't sell it because you know there are no buyers for old machines. People like to buy new ones and throw away the old. By the way, do you know something about the junk-eating plant in the Pacific?"

"No, dad," Ramu looked at his father curiously.

"I will tell you later. Meanwhile, you eat these protein-flakes I

have specially brought for you from the factory. These are very delicious. We have introduced a new flavour this month. This one has cocoa flavour."

His father took out some packets from his bag and opened one.

"What's a cocoa, Dad?" Ramu asked, inserting a dark brown flake in his mouth.

Noticing that Ramu's sense of curiosity was returning, his father felt happy. "Good boy!" he commented, "if you ask questions like this, you may become a genius without the help of Rabu. One must know the past to improve life in the present and for the future. Now you should forget about your disappointment in the examination and cheer up. Where is Rabu, any way?"

"In the junk-room. Tell me about cocoa, please," Ramu became impatient to know more.

"Cocoa is a bead-like fruit which was used in popular drinks and eatables in the twentieth century. Just as we have the summer juice these days. Do you know how summer juice is made? From the shallow-sea weeds!" Ramu's father explained.

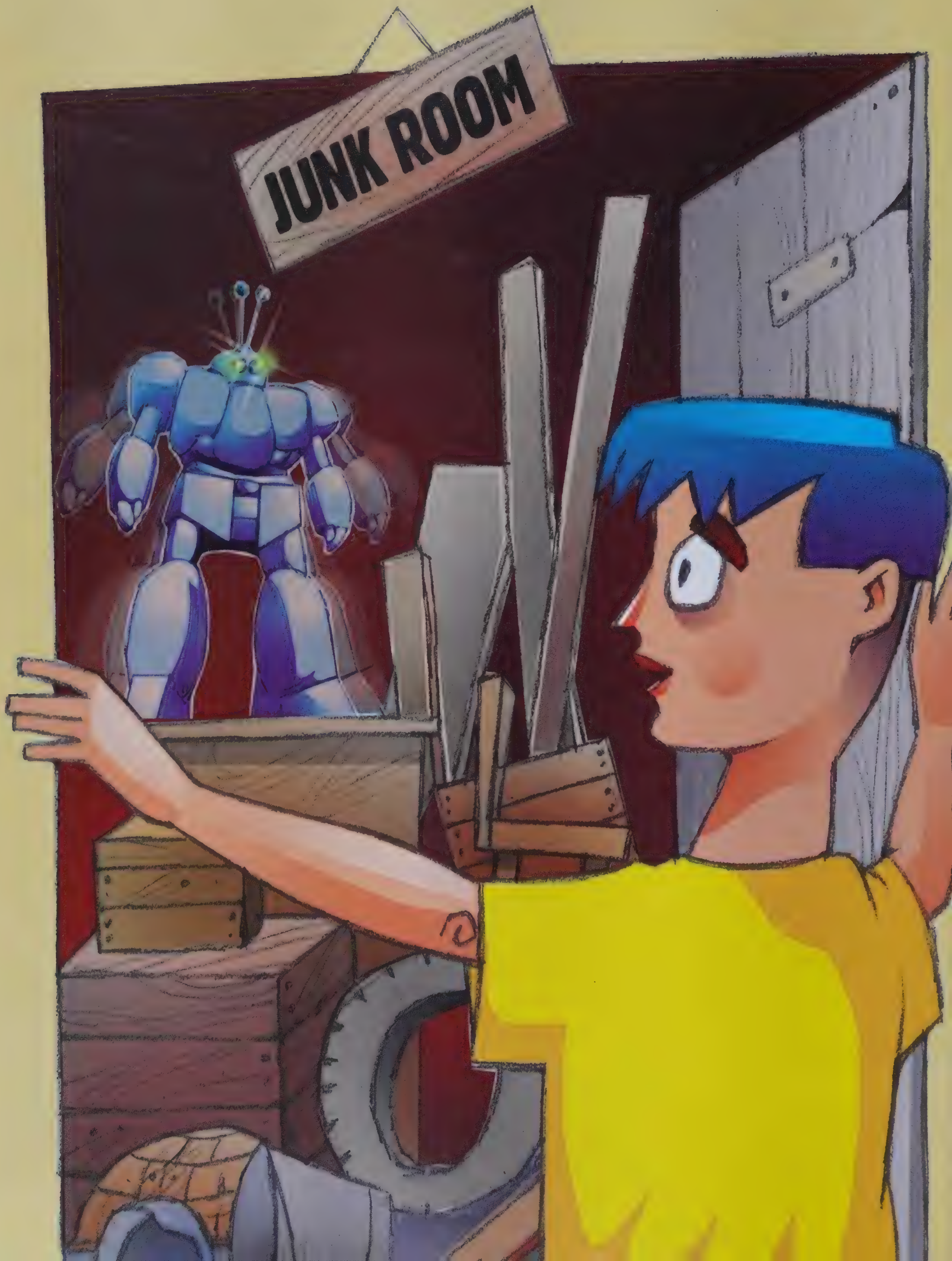
"Yes, Dad! And you were telling me about the junk-eating plant in the Pacific," Ramu reminded his father.

"Oh yes. You know every house has a junk-room or junk-yard, where old or damaged machines are dumped. All this junk is collected and taken to the junk-eating plant. Where, all the junk is thrown into huge dissolving tanks. In a matter of few hours, the metal and plastic gets separated automatically. Which then are transferred to separate tanks and all parts of haphazard shapes get melted and crystalised. These crystals of metals and plastics are then retrieved from the tanks and rolled into sheets and lumps of different sizes. This material is sent to various factories for use in making new machines. This whole process takes about 15 days," Ramu's father finished his narration.

This conversation changed Ramu's mood. He said, "Dad, is our

Rabu also going to be sent to the junk-eating plant? It seems that there are no buyers."

"No, Ramu, we need not send your Rabu to the junk-eating plant nor do you have to sell it. In a few days, you shall be celebrating your birthday. You can use it for serving eatables to your friends. In the meantime, it may also be used to maintain your favourite blue plasto-lawn outside your room. After that, we will see how to make


JUNK ROOM

use of Rabu further. Go to the junk-room and retrieve Rabu. You need not reactivate all the programmes but only a few manual functions and the batteries. This will prevent it from 'teaching' you and you will be forced to use your own brain for learning. If you are unable to do it, I will send it to the robot laboratory and get it re-programmed." Ramu's father got up and went to his room, patting Ramu on the back with affection.

Ramu went to the junk-room to retrieve his robot. Rabu was standing motionless in the corner where it was kept. As advised by his father, Ramu looked at the panel of various control buttons to reset the programme and pressed a few buttons. He heard a strange noise from the belly of the machine. In seconds, the robot showed signs of activity but Ramu did not see any message of confirmation on the console panel to indicate that the programme had been reset as required by Ramu. Instead of that, all of a sudden, the Robot started moving its arms in a strange way. Its 'eyes' started flashing brightly. Such behaviour of Rabu was quite strange and confusing.

Soon Ramu realised that something had gone wrong. He looked up and saw few big rats coming out from the air-cooling hole in the robot's right shoulder. Rat was one creature that had survived into twenty-first century. Although the twentieth century men had tried all possible methods to eliminate this species from the earth. It was clear that rats had disturbed the internal wiring of the robot and that was why, instead of responding as per the set programme, it was behaving strangely.

For a moment, Ramu was quite perplexed and confused. He swiftly leaped away from the robot as by now, it was moving about its hands violently and the flashes in its 'eyes' were somewhat frightening. His eyes emitted sparks and were not the usual blue but were like the colour of fire! He immediately bolted the door of the junk-room and rushed to his father.

## RABU GOES MAD

Gasping for breath, Ramu narrated to his father, the strange changes in Rabu. His father who was preoccupied with his business work only said, "Don't worry son; everything will be alright."

With his mind full of anxiety, Ramu headed for his own room. He had just switched on his tele-projector when he heard a crashing sound. It came from the direction of junk-room. He rushed to that side. He saw that the door of junk-room was broken into pieces and Rabu was slowly advancing towards his father's room. Ramu got startled and shouted, "Dad, Dad! Rabu!"

His father came out running and found Rabu just facing him. He noticed its hands moving in a peculiar way and red flashes shooting from its eyes.

"Run, Dad! Rabu has broken the junk-room door," Ramu shouted again. His father stepped aside but was thrown on the ground with a violent sweep of Rabu's hand. Luckily, he fell on the thick, soft plastic lawn and was not hurt except that his shirt was torn and the metallic fingers of Rabu had bruised his shoulder. "Oh! Dad!" Ramu cried and ran to his father. By that time his father had got up and said, "Don't cry. I am not hurt. But where is Rabu?"

"I saw him entering your room. Let's run away from here, Dad!" Ramu mumbled.

"There is no need to panic, Ramu. We will go across the road and ring up Robotics Department. Their staff will come and remove the deranged robot from our house." His father held Ramu's hand and both crossed the street swiftly, looking back cautiously. But the robot

could not be seen, nor could any sound be heard from the room which it had entered.

Within few minutes, three officials of Robotics Department came in a special vehicle fitted with many instruments for controlling or destroying dangerous robots and other machines with magnetronic rays. Ramu's father told those men to look for the robot in his room. One of the staff directed a scanning antenna towards that room but the robot's image did not appear on the viewing screen. All were surprised by its absence from the room where it had entered only a short while ago.

Ramu's father asked the men to search the entire house and the surrounding area covered with huge plastic trees and shrubs. The search-antenna was directed to all the rooms and other directions, yet nothing could be seen on the viewing screen.

"Can we enter the house, now? Is it safe?" Ramu's father asked them.

"Yes sir, it is surely not in the house. It must have moved away to quite a distance from here. We have thoroughly scanned not only your house but a large area around it." Assured the man from Robotics Department.

"Where could it have gone, Dad?" Ramu asked, looking amazed as well as sad.

"Can't say. We have to either launch a search on large scale or make an announcement on the tele-news. What would you like to do, Sir?" the man asked.

"Let us first check what it has done inside the house," Ramu's father suggested.

Ramu, his father and one of the men from Robotics Department went inside the room in which the robot had entered.

Ramu's father's bed was upturned, his table was broken, curtains were torn, a decoration statue was thrown under its pedestal and study-table was also broken. The door opening on the other side

was broken too and there was no doubt that Rabu had escaped through that door. But it was difficult to make out its further progress as no tell-tale signs were visible.

"Quite a damage it has caused, man. It might now create havoc in other houses also," Ramu's father appeared worried.

"Yes Sir, such possibility is there and something must be done about it quickly. I would say that an immediate announcement should be sent on the tele-news," the official stated.

Ramu, who was quite bewildered, said, "Dad, have you noticed one thing?"

"What's that?"

"Rabu has tried to destroy only those things which are white in colour. The door of the junk-room, your rooms' door, your bed, the statue and the shirt you were wearing when it attacked you, were all of white colour! Objects of any other colour have not been damaged," Ramu observed looking around.

"That's a brilliant boy! Sir, what Ramu says may be correct. Perhaps this robot of yours has got colour disorientation. We should have thought about this. Thanks for the bright idea Ramu, the job of searching the robot would be less difficult now. If you permit, Sir, we shall make an announcement on your behalf that people in this area should not come out wearing white clothes and keep their white coloured items well out of sight. I do not think the robot would disturb items of any other colour," the Robotics Department's official declared.

"Please make such announcement on the tele-news right away. We will get in touch with you again, if required," Ramu's father added.

"Come, Ramu, let's put our things in order."

## SEARCHING FOR RABU

Forty-eight hours had passed but no information was received about Rabu. Ramu's father had to go out of town to look after his business for a few weeks. He wanted to take Ramu with him as he was worried that the mad robot might turn up some day, create mischief or even harm Ramu. Although the staff from Robotics Department had assured that the robot was not likely to return as it might have either gone quite far or would have destroyed itself while encountering some strong white object! However, Ramu's father was not free from apprehension. The City Police had also been alerted but they too had no clue about the whereabouts of Rabu.

Ramu's birthday was not far now. He wanted to stay at home and celebrate his birthday with his friends. So his father left after giving instructions to the City Police as well as the Robotics Department for the safety of Ramu.

Ramu often thought about Rabu. He did not like the idea of Rabu being destroyed. He wished him to be retrieved and repaired. He wanted to keep it in his room even though it might not be of any use. He remembered that the robot had developed a fatal attraction to white objects and tried to destroy them. With this idea in mind, Ramu decided to go out in search of Rabu. He owned a white mini-car which was kept locked in the garage. It ran noiselessly on hydro-oxygen fuel. He set the charger on to replenish the electric ignition batteries during the night.

The car was ready to move next morning. Ramu started thinking about his plan of operation. He put on black clothes and set out in his white mini-car. He was hopeful that if Rabu by any chance 'saw'

his white car, it would be attracted towards the car. If it so happened, he had planned to come out and run away from the car because Rabu would not attack him as he was wearing black clothes. He carried a small wireless telephone so that he could contact the Robotics Department or the City Police as soon as Rabu was sighted. He also carried the small console-box, which was tuned to the robot's system, with control buttons to call and give various commands to Rabu.

He proceeded towards the direction in which he thought Rabu would have gone, keeping an eye on the console-box all the time. The first day ended without his getting any clue about Rabu. Yet he enjoyed his effort and felt quite refreshed after a long drive instead of doing nothing at home.

During his outing he observed many interesting things. Many automatic cars passed by his side that needed no drivers but were programmed to move on their own. The people sitting in the cars enjoyed their movies and music on the lucid screens in front of them. There were robots cleaning the streets, and at crossings directing movement of traffic. Some robots were seen playing games with children in parks. He stopped by a park and enjoyed delicious eats served by robots. He decided to continue his search for Rabu.

On the next day, Ramu thought of going to one of his friends, so that both could search for the robot together. His friend's place was quite far away. Ramu had to drive through a patch of deserted area that was preserved as a natural forest. There were some very old monuments in this forest; huge dilapidated buildings mostly made of grey stones. Ramu had gone there once earlier with his school-friends for picnic. As he was passing by one of these buildings, Ramu heard a weak 'pip-pip' sound from his console-box, which lay in his pocket. He slowed down his car and looked around carefully. The 'pip-pip' signal went off by the time Ramu stopped the car. He pulled himself out of the car and took out the console-box from his pocket.

The contact light was off which meant that the signal was lost. He slowly stepped forward in the direction of those massive ruins, with courage and determination.

'What would he do if he confronted Rabu?' thought Ramu. He was not prepared for facing such a situation. If Rabu was around, it

might respond to the commands from the console-box. He could give commands and directions to the robot from the console-box, by pushing buttons; to call it, to change its direction and to make it idle.

Last time when the robot went berserk, its contact with the console-box was broken. Ramu decided that keeping the contact button on would surely make the robot active, if it were within range. There would hardly be any time for Ramu to run for safety. But without keeping the contact button on, it was difficult to locate Rabu!

As soon as he went a few steps further, Ramu again heard a very weak 'pip-pip' sound from the box and the contact light flashed. Ramu was thrilled! He pressed the button for calling Rabu and kept standing near his car. He had planned that if Rabu happened to come out of it's hiding suddenly, he could even jump into his car and speed away. He became alert for an encounter with Rabu!

The contact signal went 'pip-pip' and the light on the console-box continued to buzz and flash but Rabu was nowhere in sight. Ramu started moving forward again, taking slow steps. He did not want to go too far away from his car. He felt sure that Rabu was hidden inside those ruins. If he informed the Robotics Department, their men would come immediately and destroy the robot. The City Police would also do the same. Ramu did not like this idea, as he did not want his Rabu to be destroyed.

Why not put off the console-box completely, keep it in his pocket and search for Rabu by just looking around the ruins. Apparently, there was no serious danger because of the black clothes he was wearing but one could not be sure of the behaviour of Rabu! Nevertheless, Ramu enjoyed walking in and around those monumental ruins. They reminded him of his history lessons. Some mighty king must have built the grand palaces centuries ago. The morning sun was bright and the few natural trees and bushes around were looking far more beautiful than those plastic and foam trees

erected by the Artificial Forest Department in the city. He always asked his father to take him to natural forests for picnics but such places were too far and few. And his father did not have enough time to take him there.

Ramu put off the console-box and lost contact with Rabu. He checked himself to make sure that he was not carrying anything of white colour. He had a white handkerchief but it was well inside the pocket of his black jacket. Soon, he was standing at the magnificent gate of one of those ruins. It was a huge one and everything except the four walls was in a state of collapse. He gathered courage and peeped inside the gate. He carefully looked in the four corners and felt safe, as Rabu was not to be seen. He ran and jumped with joy over the grey, massive stones scattered around. When he came out of that building, he was full of confidence and hope. He looked inside two more such ruins but found no trace of Rabu.

Ramu felt hungry after this unusual exercise. He munched some protein-flakes brought from his fathers' factory. It was about noon time. He now wanted to use his console-box. But before doing that, he climbed on the top of the highest building through a narrow stairway. It was a vast roof-top surrounded by a metre-high ornamental parapet, which was cracked and broken at many places. Small natural shrubs and creepers were peeping out of these cracks. There were beautifully carved white marble stones inlayed in the parapet.

He glanced around. Everything looked so grand and beautiful. He stood in the centre of the high platform and pressed the contact button on his console-box. The contact light flashed brightly and the 'pip-pip' sound buzzed clearly to show that Rabu was surely somewhere near that building. Without giving a second thought in the excitement of the moment, he pressed the "call" button!

## ENCOUNTER WITH RABU

As Ramu looked around the dilapidated roof, his console-box was buzzing with a clear 'pip-pip' signal. The contact light became brighter. It was a sure sign that Rabu was moving towards him. He directed his senses towards the narrow

stairway in expectation of hearing the approaching sound of Rabu's footsteps. He was not wrong! He heard some scratching noises from the side of the stairway. As if somebody was trying to peel the plaster off the walls although there was hardly any plaster left over those ruins.

Ramu suddenly realised that there was no escape for him if the mad robot appeared from the stairway. Rabu would possibly block the only way out. The roof itself was too high for Ramu to jump to the ground. He felt trapped!

The first thing he could think of was to switch off the console-box, breaking his contact with Rabu. This was his way of making the robot inactive. But he remembered that since its derangement some days back, Rabu had been active by itself in spite of the console-box being in 'off' position. He, therefore, suspected that Rabu might still move up towards the roof where he was standing.

The sun had tilted towards the west. The inlayed white marble-stones in the parapet facing the stairway, were now shining brightly under the sun, like decorated silver plates. The scratching noises from the stairway became louder. Indicating that something was now moving upwards. Ramu became alert and moved silently towards the corner behind the opening of the stairway. He could now hear a clear sound of metal foot-steps that could not be of human kind! Within few moments, while Ramu stood motionless and nearly breathless, he saw the tip of one of the antennas of Rabu emerging from the opening of the stairway!

Ramu observed that Rabu halted at each step, examined the ground level, calculated the height of the step; only then did it lift its foot to place firmly on the next higher step, balancing itself correctly. This took about half a second for each step. On level ground, it could walk faster.

Ramu was hopelessly looking now at Rabu's head as it peeped out of the stairway opening and at the dead console-box in his hand.

He had no way to stop Rabu from climbing up. In a few seconds, as Ramu stood watching, Rabu completed its climb and stepped out on the roof, facing the parapet. It then moved forward swiftly and struck with great force at the white marble stones inlayed in the parapet. Rabu then quickly turned to its left. It walked a few steps and again turned left, now facing Ramu, just a few metres away!

Ramu saw that Rabu's hands and fingers were damaged and had become crooked. Its right eye-socket had cracked. Both its eyes, however, were bright red. Its antenna revolved only half-way on each side and got fixed towards Ramu. Then Rabu took one step forward and stood exactly face to face with Ramu. Its arms were moving about randomly and bright red flashes emanating from its eye buttons! It was as if the robot was making an assessment of the object in front, that is, Ramu, all in black. This was truly an examination time for Ramu!

Ramu exercised his mind for a quick solution to the situation he was facing. Rabu was standing quite close to Ramu's only escape path, the stairway. Ramu moved towards the far corner of the roof along the broken parapet. Rabu also turned its head and slowly followed Ramu. It was good, Ramu thought, that Rabu's motion had become slow which gave him some time to think and act. The parapet at the corner of the roof where Ramu was standing was totally broken and some shrubs had grown in its place.

A bright idea flashed in Ramu's mind! He quickly took out the white handkerchief he carried in his pocket, spread it on top of the shrubs and ran towards the other far end of the roof to his right side.

Rabu continued to move towards the broken parapet hidden by the shrubs and on reaching there, struck at the white handkerchief violently with both hands. As the parapet was broken and the roof was uneven, this violent action of Rabu, threw it off balance and it fell headlong down the roof, crashing on the massive stone platform several metres down. Ramu watched from the roof as Rabu's head

got detached from its body due to the impact of the fall. It was lying flat and no longer showed signs of any movement.

Ramu felt very happy that he could save himself but also felt sorry for his friendly Rabu! He picked up his handkerchief from the bush and wiped the afternoon sweat from his face. He switched on his console-box but there was neither the 'pip-pip' sound nor any contact light as its counterpart, Rabu, was completely un-responsive. Ramu came down the roof with joy and confidence and went where the robot was now lying like a crumpled skeleton. With some hesitation, he touched it and felt amused. The electronic parts located inside its head were mostly broken and the battery was shaken out of its slot.

Ramu spent some time there and wondered whether a robot could be man's best friend or worst enemy! He believed that a robot could be man's best friend if used wisely otherwise it can be dangerous. A thought also flashed in Ramu's mind that even man could be quite as unpredictable as a robot and as dangerous too!

If Rabu were as light as a toy, Ramu could have picked it up and brought it home in his car. But it was quite big and heavy for him. So he left the place after giving the fallen Rabu his last affectionate look.

Driving his car back home, Ramu informed the City Police and Robotics Department about the discovery and condition of Rabu.

As for his next birthday, he decided to ask his father to get him another robot!

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